



Benedict Moore-Bridger

Payout but 'no apology' after boy, six, loses part of finger at top school

THE family of a six-year-old boy who lost part of his finger at one of Britain's most prestigious schools today revealed their £13,000 payout – but said they have still had no apology.

Russian film producers Elena and Dimitriy Lesnevskiy threatened legal action when their son Leon had the tip of his finger amputated after getting it trapped in a classroom door at Bevendean, the pre-prep school attached to Danes Hill School in Oxshott, Surrey.

They sent a legal letter demanding damages for Leon's "excruciating pain and suffering", and today said the school's insurers had paid out more than £13,000 – which they are donat-

ing to charity. However, they criticised the school's handling of the situation, claiming they have been stonewalled by staff who wanted to "sweep it under the carpet".

A meeting with the head was appar-

ently cancelled, and emails from their lawyer to the governors and the head have gone unanswered.

A complaints procedure also appears to have ground to a halt.

Following surgery, Leon's finger was

reattached and he is slowly recovering. But his parents have now removed Leon and his older brother Panton, eight, from the school, choosing to homeschool them instead.

Elena Lesnevskaya, 35, who moved to the UK with her husband six years ago, said: "We came to the UK because of the very good schools – it is such a frustration to have such a situation.

"They have never said sorry. When you send a child to school you do not expect them to return with part of their body missing. Can you imagine the shock?"

"They have treated us terribly. They have never said sorry or explained what happened."

The family's lawyer, Peter Steen, a litigation partner at Mishcon de Reya, said: "It is a very sad state of affairs. They have not admitted liability.

"There has been a payout but there is a continuing lack of any progress in the complaints process."

The school's head William Murdock is understood to have turned down a



Shocked: Russian film producer Dimitriy Lesnevskiy, whose son Leon was at Bevendean pre-prep school

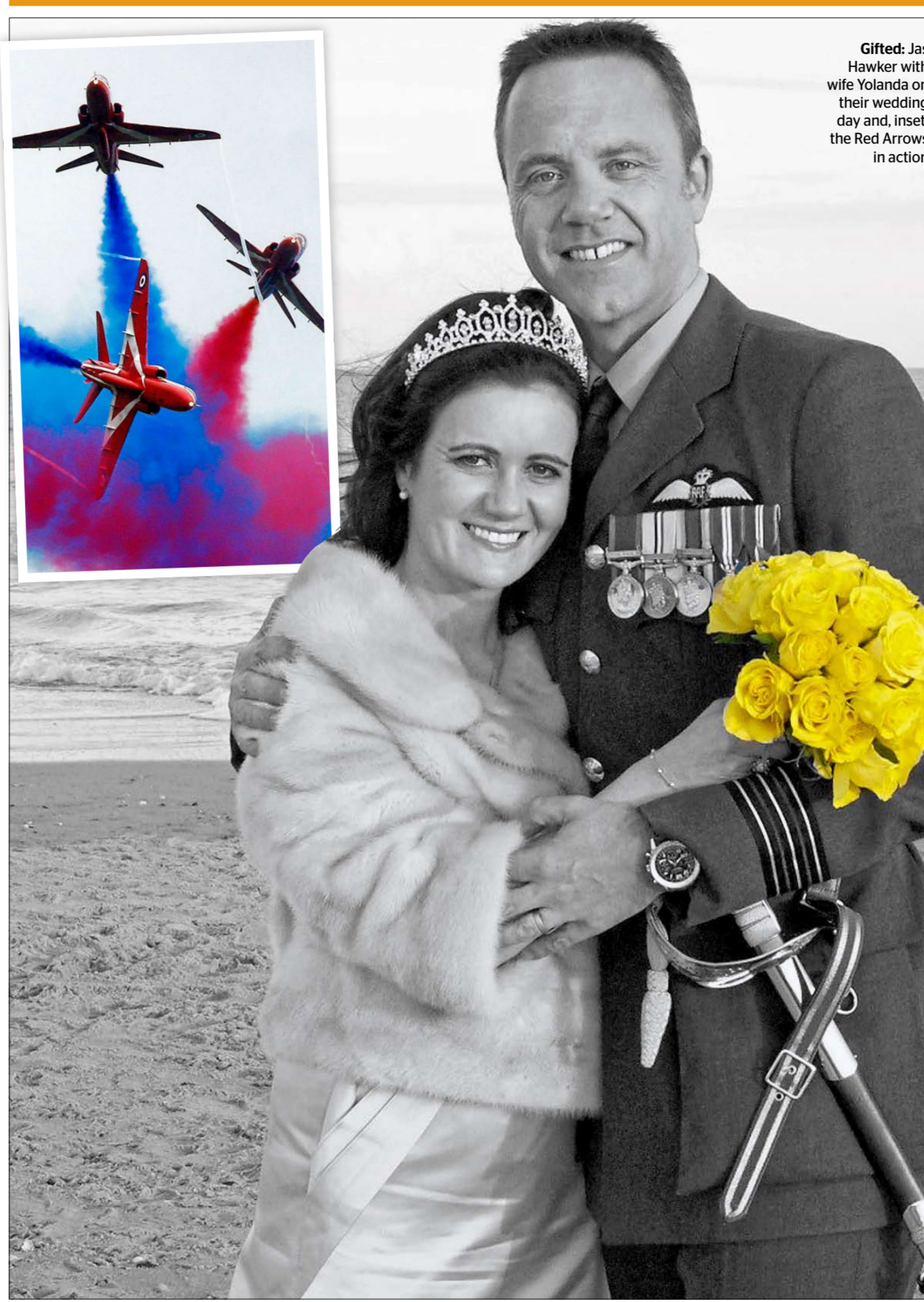
meeting following the incident on June 22 as he objected to the presence of a lawyer.

Mrs Lesnevskaya said she wanted the lawyer to be present because her English is not perfect and also to ensure that the school – which charges fees of up to £17,500 a year – was properly investigating.

Mr Murdock could not be reached for comment, but previously told the family through their lawyer that everyone was "shocked" by the incident, adding: "We were all most upset and our thoughts were entirely with Leon who is much loved by all of his teachers."

The school added in a statement: "This was an unfortunate accident. The school takes the safety of all its pupils extremely seriously."

@benm_b



Gifted: Jas Hawker with wife Yolanda on their wedding day and, inset, the Red Arrows in action

A FORMER RAF fighter pilot has launched a website to help people never miss a birthday or anniversary again.

Jas Hawker came up with the idea after almost forgetting his second wedding anniversary.

The 44-year-old, who was also leader of the Red Arrows, set himself reminders but still found himself rushing around the shops the day before, trying to buy anything he could find.

He has since launched MyGiftGenie, a one-stop shop for making sure you never miss an important anniversary as well as providing customers with a list of gifts for their loved one.

Mr Hawker said: "I'm pretty organised and I set reminders in my calendar about important events so why did I

Flying ace on a mission to help the forgetful land perfect presents

find myself rushing around the shops the day before my second wedding anniversary looking for a suitable gift?

"Despite me setting two calendar reminders I still blew it. I realised it was not easy to find high-quality gifts for specific occasions online."

Mr Hawker, from Poole, added: "Gifts should be deliberate, thoughtful and

functional. I did spend a bit of time navigating the thousands of online gift stores suggesting everything from a cuddly toy to a weekend in Vegas but after about 10 minutes I was completely lost in the noise of what was on offer. The outcome, nothing."

He said: "I hoped that she would be OK with just a card but as any man will tell you, a disappointed look from your wife and her saying 'it's OK dear, I don't mind' is not a great place to be."

On MyGiftGenie, when customers set up a reminder they also set a budget for the gift they might want to buy that person. When a reminder is sent by email, customers can click on a link to a list of gifts that fit their preferences.

Kiran Randhawa

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Met helps suspects turn over

Martin Bentham
Home Affairs Editor

SUSPECTS held in London police cells will be offered free books to take with them when they leave under a new Met scheme to encourage reading and divert offenders from crime.

Novels including Treasure Island, Great Expectations, Moby Dick and The Catcher In The Rye will be among 30 titles available at each of Scotland Yard's 43 custody suites.

Some will be in foreign languages and each will contain a leaflet telling suspects of free educational courses and how to join them. The scheme, backed

by the charity Give A Book, has been introduced in response to an idea from Special Constable Steve Whitmore.

The officer said he believed that reading could reduce crime and transform lives.

"The aim of this is to provide easy-to-read books that are familiar, tangible and can be kept," he added.

"The scheme also provides a possible alternative pathway for young detainees by flagging up free educational courses and access to charities with diversion options."

He said the example of an 18-year-old man he arrested this year for assault and possession of drugs illustrated the

a new leaf with free books

scheme's benefits. The suspect had asked if he could have a book to read in custody and Special Constable Whitmore responded by giving him his personal copy of The Catcher In The Rye, telling him to keep it.

"The look on his face was amazing," said the officer. "His attitude and hostility towards me completely changed and it created common ground. He said he'd never been given a book to own before and that really moved me."

Victoria Gray, a trustee of Give A Book, which is providing the books, said the scheme was "a brilliant idea" and in keeping with the charity's existing donations to schools and prisons.

She added: "We thought carefully of the types of books that should go in – quick reads, short stories, poetry, books that are immediately engaging – and were able to provide them."

"All of the books involved come through the charity so this doesn't cost the Met anything."

"Just the act of giving a book can change a difficult situation. It shows that you're being thought about differently. Reading can help turn people's lives around."

An easy-to-read junior magazine, called The Week, is also being offered for young detainees.

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